

## **Imagination Plaza:**

### **A downtown economic development proposal for the City of Meridian**

#### **Summary**

The City of Meridian's downtown faces several obstacles to becoming a vibrant and life filled center, "the heart of the community". A "to" vs. "through" traffic route distracts from the downtown core's realization of what the area can offer. With the heavy traffic flow going through the heart of downtown, it makes it difficult for the area to be easily accessed. In addition, there is limited parking available. Our vision is to create a centralized pedestrian and family friendly gathering area with a dual store front block that includes customer oriented businesses including coffee shop, restaurant, a Coop, and other small businesses designed to bring families and social groups together. Our design incorporates grass lined open areas with park benches, outdoor play stations for the kids with a cultural and imagination development theme, embodied in public art and pockets for relaxation. A multi-level parking structure will be constructed across the street to meet code and in preparation for the transit plaza development.

#### **Primary Assignments**

Delta James – Panelist to interview City Planner, Power Point designer, Photographer

Aviva Koljesky-Prepare written Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan

Allen Parker-Panelist to interview Mayor deWeerd, Power Point designer, Presenter

LeAnn Simmons-Prepare written Economic Development Strategy and Implementation Plan, Presenter

#### **Organizational Structure**

- Public – Private Partnership of Meridian Development Corporation and Imagination Plaza, LLC.

#### **Downtown Meridian Case Problem**

##### **Threats / Weaknesses**

- "To" vs. "Through": Meridian downtown market analysis states that great downtowns are "To" places and through traffic degrades the downtown experience.
- Deconflicting pedestrian oriented business activities from the "through" traffic
- Defining the heart of the community
- Addressing building vacancy
- Historic structure preservation
- Lack of mixed income housing in the downtown core
- No substantial niche in the Treasure Valley economy
- Weak downtown merchants' association

##### **Opportunities / Strengths**

- Numbers of young families can provide workforce, customer base, commuter base, volunteer base. The largest population group in 2000 was the under 5 age and the second

largest group is children 5-9.

- Central geographic location in the Treasure Valley
- Proximity to potential rail-based transit
- Strong median income
- Strong base of planning and policy
- Intact alleyways
- Availability of property to develop that is adjacent to public access easements and right of ways

### **Targeted economic development project**

Big idea: Create a complete environment for entrepreneurial economic development to flourish in downtown Meridian.

We will begin phase one of this idea by creating an imaginative family friendly demonstration project on a key Old Town City block.

Our focus is to capture and foster the growth of the creative ideas of residents, entrepreneurs and, especially, youth.

Means: Imagination Plaza - a mixed use development designed to provide the “fertile soil” for entrepreneurship by creating an intensity in a core downtown block (the southeast corner of which begins at Main Street and Broadway) that provides the complete environment for living, work, and creativity. This development will:

- Honor existing businesses (Busted Shovel, Saddle Shop) and historic nature of buildings
- Maximize the benefit of its proximity to future transit-oriented development and complement the use of a potential transit stop developed on the 20 acres along the rail corridor
- Provide a destination family gathering spot – with cultural, social and recreational focuses - and dual store front spaces surrounding a family plaza that includes
  - Activities / interactive imagination stations for kids (i.e. Discovery Center)
  - Social gathering spots
  - Public art
  - Urban / community gardens
- Include a program for start-up business leasable space with an emphasis on section 3 businesses
- Include a parking structure with leasable frontage

### **Outlined strategy and implementation plan**

While a development concept has been proposed here, final determination of project feasibility necessitates further community dialogue, research and planning. Strategic planning elements include:

- Community engagement throughout the process

- Outreach and communications
  - Utilize artist to visually capture community ideas
  - Video PSA to be shown before outdoor movies
  - Surveying / interviewing at public events
  - Utilize social marketing strategies (i.e. Facebook, Twitter)
- Involve stakeholders in defining vision for Imagination Plaza
- Address future markets created by transit opportunities
- Ensure the project fits within the regulatory environment of the area by aligning with existing codes
- Prepare market analysis and land appraisal
- An environmental review will be conducted to determine project viability
- Approach current property owners to acquire project property and or develop cooperative ownership
- Evaluate buildings for structural and historic integrity
- Explore leveraging opportunities to attract additional funding including:
  - CDBG (business training for section 3, infrastructure improvements, slum & blight abatement)
  - Venture capital (business start up)
  - Grants
  - Tax Increment Financing as match

Implementation of the above will be lead by the Meridian Development Corporation in partnership with Imagination Plaza LLC and the City of Meridian.

Team III  
Imagination Plaza

Team Members

- Delta James
- LeAnn Simmons
- Allen Parker
- Aviva Koljesky

We are a public-private partnership of the Meridian Development Corporation and Imagination Plaza LLC

The Panel is an executive team of the city